

October 2022

Compliance Review Report

National Party of Australia-Victoria

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Purpose of this report

Pursuant to s 316(2A) of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (Electoral Act), this report provides the party agent of the National Party of Australia - Victoria (the party) with the Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC) assessment of the level of compliance of the 2020–21 annual disclosure return lodged on behalf of the party with disclosure obligations under ss 314AB, 314AC and 314AE of the Electoral Act.

Disclosure obligations

Registered political parties and associated entities are required under Part XX of the Electoral Act to furnish returns.

Section 314AB of the Electoral Act requires the party agent of a registered political party to furnish a return within 16 weeks after the end of each financial year, disclosing:

- the total amount received by, or on behalf of, the party, during the financial year, together with the details specified by s 314AC of the Electoral Act;
- the total amount paid by, or on behalf of, the party, during the financial year; and
- the total outstanding amount, as at the end of the financial year, of all debts incurred by or on behalf of, the party, together with the details specified by s 314AE of the Electoral Act.

Section 314AC of the Electoral Act provides that if the sum of all amounts received by, or on behalf of, the party from a person or organisation during a financial year is more than the threshold amount specified therein, the annual disclosure return must include the particulars of that sum.

Section 314AE of the Electoral Act provides that if the sum of all outstanding debts incurred by, or on behalf of, the party to a person or an organisation during a financial year is more than the threshold amount specified therein, the annual disclosure return must include the particulars of that sum.

For the 2020–21 financial year, the threshold was for sums in excess of \$14,300.

The Electoral Act is available in full in the following link:

<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C1918A00027>

Conduct of the review

The authorised officer of the AEC has authority under s 316(2A) to require the production of documents and giving of evidence for the purpose of assessing compliance with the disclosure obligations required of registered political parties and associated entities under Part XX of the Electoral Act.

Subsection 316(2A) requires the party agent of a registered political party to produce the documents or other things referred to in a notice served by the authorised officer within the period and in the manner specified in the notice or to appear, at the time and place specified in the notice, before the authorised officer to give evidence, either orally or in writing, and to produce the documents or other things referred to in the notice.

As part of this process, the authorised officer of the AEC served a notice on the party agent under s 316(2A) requiring the party to provide its financial records and other documents in relation to its financial operations for 2020–21.

Scope of the review

The records which were requested by the AEC from the party were limited to those which enabled the AEC to assess the following aspects of compliance with its disclosure obligations under Part XX of the Electoral Act:

- the timeliness of lodgement of the annual disclosure return
- the completeness and accuracy of the following information disclosed in the party's annual disclosure return (as amended on 1 February 2022) for the 2020–21 financial year:
 - total gifts in kind
 - individual receipts above \$14,300
 - total debts
 - individual debts above \$14,300

The AEC did not examine other aspects of the financial operations of the party such as the existence or effectiveness of internal controls.

Stakeholder engagement

The AEC's general practice is to communicate with the relevant officer of the party by phone, email and/or face to face meetings as appropriate to cover the following topics:

- financial reports and documentation available from the party's accounting system
- compliance issues arising from the AEC review of the financial reports and documentation provided by the party
- required and suggested amendments to the annual disclosure return which arise from the compliance review
- potential enhancements in the party's understanding of disclosure obligations and accounting processes to improve future compliance.

During the review the party provided documentation to the AEC as requested and within set timeframe.

A draft compliance review report was issued by the authorised officer of the AEC on 5 October 2022. The party was provided with an opportunity to comment on the draft report by 12 October 2022. The party did not provide any comments but, requested an extension to lodge the amendment by 20 October 2022. The amendment was lodged on 20 October 2022.

Review outcomes

1. Timely lodgement

Subsection 314AB(1) of the Electoral Act requires the party agent of the registered political party to lodge an annual disclosure return with the AEC within 16 weeks after the end of the financial year. As lodgement occurred on 15 October 2021 which is before the due date of 20 October 2021, the return complied with the requirement under s 314AB(1) to lodge a return for a registered political party within 16 weeks after the end of the financial year.

2. Accuracy in reporting – amendments

After examining the documents provided by the entity for the review, the authorised officer of the AEC identified several issues relating to compliance with disclosure obligations under sections 314AB and 314AE of the Electoral Act. The issues are discussed in detail below.

Total Debts

Paragraph 314AB(2)(a) of the Electoral Act requires the party agent to report the total outstanding amount as at the end of the financial year of all debts incurred by or, on behalf of, the party.

Total reportable debts of the entity were over-stated in the entity's 2020–21 annual disclosure return. The amount recorded as total debts in the return is required to be amended by the entity in order to ensure compliance with the Electoral Act. The relevant amendment is set out below.

Part 4: Total Debts – amendment	
Total disclosed in return	\$1,117,521
Amended total	\$39,029

Debts of more than \$14,300

Section 314AE of the Electoral Act provides that if the sum of all outstanding debts, incurred by, or on behalf of, the party to a person or an organisation during a financial year is more than the threshold, the return must include the particulars of that sum.

Individual debts exceeding the threshold were over-disclosed in the party's 2020–21 annual disclosure return. A number of amendments to individual debts exceeding the \$14,300 threshold are required in order to ensure compliance with the Electoral Act. The relevant amendments are set out below.

Part 5: Debts of more than \$14,300 – amendments				
Entry	Name	Address	Amount Owed	Financial/Non-financial institution
Original entry no. 1	Victorian Electoral Commission (2022 Election Advance Public Funding)	Level 11, 530 Collins Street Melbourne VIC 3000	\$949,987	Non-financial Institution
Amended entry no. 1	To be Removed			
Original entry no. 2	Victorian Electoral Commission (State Admin Sep 2021 Qtr)	Level 11, 530 Collins Street Melbourne VIC 3000	\$118,267	Non-financial Institution
Amended entry no. 2	To be Removed			
New entry 1	Australian Taxation Office	747 Collins Street Docklands VIC 3008	\$18,042	Non-financial Institution

Matters requiring future action

It is recommended the party ensures the accuracy of future annual disclosure returns and therefore improve compliance with Part XX of the Electoral Act by:

- including all debts listed in the trial balance as owing to other persons and entities in the calculation of total debts, other than amounts owed for staff entitlements, regardless of the age of the debt
- examining all debts listed in the trial balance as owing to other persons and entities in identifying individual debts exceeding the threshold for disclosure
- checking the accuracy of all calculations of amounts for disclosure in the annual disclosure return.

Conclusion

The authorised officer of the AEC for the purposes of s 316(2) of the Electoral Act has assessed the 2020-21 annual disclosure return for the party lodged with the AEC on 15 October 2021 complied with the requirement under s 314AB(1) of the Electoral Act to lodge a return for a registered political party within 16 weeks after the end of the financial year.

However, in view of the discrepancies identified, the return did not comply with the provisions of ss 314AB and 314AE of the Electoral Act.

In view of the lodgement by the party agent on 20 October 2022, of an amendment to the party's 2020–21 annual disclosure return, the authorised officer of the AEC has assessed that the disclosure return (as amended) accurately includes the information required to be disclosed under the provisions of sections 314AB and 314AE of the Electoral Act.

Joanne Reid
Assistant Commissioner
Australian Electoral Commission

27 October 2022